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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the Special Education Supervisor Training (SEST) project, an effort to develop a competencies-guided training program for special education supervisors who are considered instructional leaders and change agents. Three domains were identified for use in the leadership training program: problem-solving, human relations, and supervisor leadership job tasks. Specific competencies within the domain of supervisor job tasks were defined and then validated in a national survey of special education supervisors. The survey also sought to determine if there were regional differences in the perceived importance of the SEST competency statements. Based on the survey results, a conceptual model for the training program was designed, and a pilot test of the model was conducted with 12 students. Five procedures of competency assessment were identified and initiated by project staff; these procedures are currently being refined and further evaluated. Evaluation of the entire SEST project is also presently underway. (Author/JG)

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THE DEVELOPMENT OF A CONCEPTUAL MODEL FOR COMPETENCY-GUIDED INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP PREPARATION

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The purpose of this paper is to discuss the development of a model for competency-guided preparation programs. It will not discuss the individual competencies nor the validity of these.

With the formulation of a new comprehensive plan for special education in Texas, and the resulting need for new roles for special education supervisory personnel, the Special Education Supervisor Training (SEST) project was developed. The project was funded by the Bureau of Education for the Handicapped, United States Office of Education through agreement with the Texas Education Agency and the College of Education at the University of Texas. Three developmental phases were identified for the project: 1972-73 constituted the conceptual phase, 1973-74 was the exploratory, prototype development phase, and the final year, 1974-75 was for refinement, pilot testing, evaluation and dissemination of project materials for national use.

For purposes of this project special education supervisory personnel were viewed as the instructional leaders and agents for effecting the planned change which state legislature mandated by returning handicapped children to the regular classroom mainstream. The general purpose was to "develop a training program which will equip new special education leadership personnel with the human, conceptual and technical skills necessary to effect planned change in special education practice."

The SEST project has the following goals:

1. To generate a model for the competency-guided preparation of educational leaders of all kinds, including special education supervisors, subject matter supervisors, building principals, superintendents, and other leadership personnel;

2. To develop and test a competency-guided program for the preparation of instructional supervisors;

3. To develop and organize instructional materials to facilitate independent, self-paced instructional aspects of the program;

4. To develop assessment and evaluation instruments for monitoring and evaluating competencies;

5. To develop a program design manual which would assist institutions in establishing and conducting such a program.

Competency-guided instruction for professional preparation represents a departure from some basic premises of competency-based and performance-based education programs. The following represent basic differences:

1. Competency-guided instruction is to play a part in the education of some persons who have developed certain program-defined competencies before entering a program and who will continue to develop competencies after leaving the program. Therefore, a training program is the pivotal period for attainment of professional entry level competence, with continual growth as the key to competency development.

2. Competency attainment varies in terms of entrance capabilities, growth rates, interests, and aspirations. Since competencies are very complex behavior patterns, all component behaviors are not readily identifiable nor verifiable. Therefore, assessing at pre-test points should be exploratory, tentative, and diagnostic. A training program should be "guided" by the continuing inter-

action between students, instructors, experiences, and ongoing assessments. The end-of-program assessment should reflect performance patterns related to competencies, not specific behaviors in isolation.

3. Assessments of competencies to guide instruction are measured in relative rather than absolute terms. There is room for students to go much further in some competency areas than in others, since improvement, rather than an absolute pass/fail level, is central to the continuous growth approach.

4. In a training program, both the array and character of competencies are stated publicly in advance of training.

5. Time allotted for attaining given competencies varies, but time within the total program is relatively constant.

6. In a competency-guided approach there are a variety of training activities that may extend over hours, days, weeks, or months and may be experienced concurrently. Activities are not necessarily ordered in a linear sequence nor restricted to self-paced, self-instructional, or programmed activities.

7. Competencies in professional practice are a synthesis of many specified behaviors expressed as a unity. In various individuals the component behaviors may be different and still form essentially the same performance pattern and hence represent competence.

8. Instructional activities may be self-paced or teacher/individual paced, or teacher/group paced. The critical variable is learner participation in the decision-making process regarding the what, when, how, and why of the instructional activities in which he/she is involved.

9. Learning activities should be selected so that the learner is provided the opportunity to experience a wide variety of learning methods. A training program should include a diversity of learning activities rather than relying exclusively on one format.

A competency, as defined in this competency-guided approach to supervisor training, is a statement describing the demonstration of skills and knowledge for specified outcomes related to task implementation. Such statements may be written to define competencies for the completion of an entire task or any segment thereof. The complexity and variety of knowledge and skills included in various competencies will vary, depending on the task involved.

In generating competencies for a leadership training program, three domains were identified, the combination of which would produce the required performance patterns or competencies. Domain I, Problem Solving, and Domain II, Human Relations, were seen as generic behaviors necessary to perform in educational leadership situations. The third domain represents the contributions of the specific job tasks for which the training program is designed. In this case, Domain III is Supervisor Leadership Job Tasks. These job tasks specify the expected/required behaviors of an instructional supervisor in public school settings in the U.S.A. As knowledge and skills are drawn from these three domains and combined, various patterns of anticipated performance emerge. These are referred to as Critical Competencies, indicating their central importance to the job of being an instructional change agent occupying a supervisory position. After having determined these domains, various competencies within Domain III (supervisor job tasks) were described. This was done by surveys, panels of expert judges, panels of people working in the field, panels of university professors, state department personnel, and administrators and directors of instructional programs and special education programs. These competencies were clearly defined, as per the project definition of a competency. The resulting list of critical competencies for supervisors (Domain III) represented expected behaviors in six areas: developing curriculum, developing learning resources, staffing for instruction, organizing for instruction,

utilizing supporting services, and providing inservice education.

Validation of the critical competencies was conducted in a national study of special education supervisors. The purpose of this validation study was twofold: (1) the extent to which the behavior is currently practiced in the field by persons occupying the position of special education supervisor; and (2) the perception of special education supervisors as to the competencies that should be included in an ideal training program for the preparation of special education supervisors. In addition, the study was to determine if there were regional differences in the ranking of the importance of the SEST competency statements.

The study utilized a national sample of special education supervisors in local education agencies to rank the competencies on the above criteria. The total sample of supervisors was divided into ten general regions. Each region was randomly divided into two groups. Those ranking current practice placed the competencies in four columns according to their perception of the extent to which the competency is practiced. Supervisors ranking the competencies according to an ideal training program placed nine competencies in each of four columns according to importance. After a pilot test and revision, instruments were mailed to 714 supervisors. Instruments were returned by 520 or 73% of the supervisors. Analysis of variance was used to determine significant differences and Duncan's New Multiple Range Test was used to determine where the differences occured. More similarity among regions were found than differences. Results showed significant differences among regions at the .05 level for 10 of the competencies that were rated as to extent of current practice. With respect to those competencies that would be included in an ideal training program, four showed significant differences. Priority rankings were established for the total sample as

well as for the ten regions. Competencies considered to be most important for the total group on both rankings were competencies D-1 Specifying new job descriptions, C-3 Selecting personnel, E-c Securing new services, E-1 Providing information programs, H-1 Compiling relevant data, and H-3 Designing bedgetary recommendations.

The importance of these results on the selection of competencies by regions, was to determine which should be included in a training program. Competencies rated high in all regions would necessarily be included in all programs; others would be optional, depending on the type of program being conducted. Follow-up studies are also being conducted to determine the expectancies for prospective supervisors as they are interviewed for positions.

Pilot testing of the conceptual model for the training program was conducted with 12 students during phase two of the project. Three kinds of instructional activities make up the training design: selected course work, exploratory and internship field assignment (on-going) and independent activities selected from the array of materials compiled by the project. Individual student programming decisions are carried out by a guidance team consisting of the trainee, a designated faculty supervisor and the trainee's field supervisor.

Materials were gathered and cross-referenced for use in training critical competencies. Multi-sensory, multi-media instructional tools keyed directly to critical competencies were identified. When no materials were available, development work was initiated.

Five procedures of competency assessment were identified and initiated in a system's model by project staff. These included: (1) prerequisite screening (Admission Criteria), (2) preassessment (entry level behavior), (3) in-progress assessment, (4) terminal (end of program assessment), and (5) post-

programs (on-the-job) assessment. Currently these procedures are being refined and further evaluated as to their effectiveness in determining entry-level, in-progress and terminal performance capabilities of SEST project trainees.

During this current year of the project, training procedures and materials for use in teaching instructional leadership competencies have been evaluated, revised and re-selected. Evaluation of the program model has continued so that it may serve as a guide for the development of university training programs. Further, training materials and the associated instructional procedures are being evaluated along with assessment of the achievement of trainees. The biggest thrust of the current year, however, has been in the development and evaluation of the Competency Assessment System. The purpose of this assessment is a desicion-making information feedback system.

A three-stage procedure is used in this analysis system which (1) estimates trainee's competency level, (2) identifies and sets priorities on training needs, and (3) develops data displays for use by the university guidance team in planning educational interventions. Competency estimation consists of a matrix analysis combining sources of data i.e. trainee, faculty, etc. and kinds of data i.e. knowledge, performance, etc.

Evaluation of the project is conceptualized as being both a Process Evaluation and an Outcome Evaluation. The Process Evaluation is concerned with monitoring and improving two general areas of activity: (1) Activities related to the implementation and completion of stated project plans, events, and objectives according to schedule; and (2) Activities related to the management of events, personnel, resources and communication. The second major area of the outcome evaluation concerns program outcomes. This includes: 1) Assessment of the effects of the training program on trainee performance; 2) Assessment of the products and procedures developed for the training program; and 3) Judgements about the overall outcomes of the program.

The SEST project has developed a competencies-guided training program for special education supervisors who are viewed as instructional leaders and change agents. The competencies identified have been validated and can be translated into a national model for implementation by training institutions with only minor adjustments. Evaluation of the project is presently being conducted.

For further information, data or final documents concerning this Special Education Supervisor Training project, contact the SEST Project, University of Texas at Austin, Department of Educational Administration, Education Annex F-38, Austin, Texas 78712.

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